

Guilden Sutton Parish Council

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2014/15

2014/15 has again been an extremely busy and particularly successful period for the Parish Council on behalf of the local community.

At the annual meeting of the Council in May 2014 it was proposed by Cllr P M Paterson and seconded by Cllr S Ringstead that Cllr M S J Roberts should be elected Chairman of the Council for the ensuing year. There being no further nominations, Cllr Roberts was elected unanimously and signed his declaration of acceptance of office. Cllr Roberts thanked Members for their support and expressed the Council's thanks to Cllr William Moulton for his year of office. Cllr Moulton thanked Members and the Clerk for their support.

It was proposed by Cllr Roberts and seconded by Cllr S Ringstead that Cllr P M Paterson should be elected Vice Chairman of the Council for the ensuing year. There being no further nominations, Cllr Paterson was elected unanimously and signed her declaration of acceptance of office. Cllr Paterson thanked Members for their support.

The following representatives/attendees were appointed to outside bodies:

Cheshire Association of Local Councils, Chester Area Meeting (three representatives). It was agreed the Chairman and Vice Chairman would be the core Members. The Clerk advised that all Members were welcome to attend but that in the event of any vote taking place, no more than three Members present from this Council should participate.

Cheshire Community Action Community Buildings Network. It was agreed that Cllr D Hughes should continue.

CPRE. It was agreed that Cllr I Brown should continue.

Guilden Sutton Village Hall Management Committee. It was agreed that Cllr D Hughes should continue to report.

Chester Villages Community Forum. It was agreed the Chairman and Vice Chairman would be the core Members. The Clerk advised that all Members and the Clerk were welcome to attend.

Cheshire Police/PCC meetings. It was agreed that Cllrs Hughes and Moulton should continue although any Member was welcome to attend.

Groups/panels:

Traffic Group. It was agreed the core membership should be Cllrs Davis, Hughes and Moulton but that any interested Member would be welcome to attend.

Advisory Panel. It was confirmed the Vice Chairman (ex officio) would chair any meetings of the Advisory Panel.

Community resilience. Should the Council agree to establish a task and finish community resilience group it was agreed this would be led by Cllr Paterson.

Appointment of office holders.

Parish Rights of Way Warden. It was agreed Mr B M Lewin should be invited to continue. This invitation was accepted by Mr Lewin and the Council was disappointed when Mr Lewin indicated his wish to resign in January 2015. A replacement is to be appointed.

Parish Tree Wardens. It was agreed Cllr I Brown and Mr A Young should be invited to continue, Mr Young serving a part year term only.

Local Bus User Contact. It was agreed Cllr Roberts should be invited to continue supported by Cllr Moulton.

Webmaster. It was agreed Mr B M Lewin should be invited to continue.

During the year, Cllr D Hughes has continued as the Council's community governor nomination to the governing body of Guilden Sutton Church of England Controlled Primary School. The Council was particularly pleased to hear the school had gained an Outstanding finding following a Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools.

The Council has continued in membership of a wide range of outside bodies including the Cheshire Association of Local Councils, Cheshire Community Action, the CPRE and the Mid Cheshire Footpath Society.

Guilden Sutton again provided the Honorary Secretary (The Clerk) of the Chester Area Meeting of the Cheshire Association of Local Councils.

The Council is grateful to Cllr Stuart Parker for his regular updates on borough council matters and for similar reports from Cllr Hughes as to the Primary School and PC R Boulton on policing matters.

Monthly meetings have been held throughout the year, apart from August, together with site meetings.

There have been extensive consultations on planning applications with the proposal for development on land off School Lane (14 affordable homes with an additional four market dwellings to provide enabling finance amended to provide for 17 dwellings, all affordable,) continuing to be at the forefront of the Council's deliberations.

The Council is pleased that members of the public continue to take advantage of public speaking time which precedes each monthly meeting to raise a range of issues and also of the regular monthly surgeries held on the first Saturday at the Summerfield Road shops.

Members and the Clerk have attended a wide range of conferences and meetings held by Cheshire West and Chester Council, Cheshire Community Action, the CPRE, the Cheshire Association of Local Councils and the Police and Crime Commissioner. These meetings bring valuable information to the parish to assist the Council in the conduct of its business and enable Members to make useful contacts with Members and officers of other authorities. Members and the Clerk have also undertaken training. In addition the Council, which holds Quality status under a previous scheme, has been awarded Foundation status under successor arrangements and is to pursue Quality status under the new requirements.

The Council and the Clerk devoted considerable time during the year to engaging with Cheshire West and Chester Council as it continued to develop its structure and working methods, particularly as these affect local councils. Guilden Sutton was originally part of the Rural West Area Partnership Board, which stretched from the Dee Estuary to Shropshire, although local engagement was achieved through a Community Forum of which Cllr S Parker is Chairman. These arrangements have been under review by the borough council.

It is worth noting that with the changing pace of localism, the relationships between Cheshire West and Chester Council and Town and Parish Councils in the borough will change as will the structures for achieving local engagement and the delivery of services. This will undoubtedly require considerable input from both Members and the Clerk.

At the time of writing last year's report, community governance arrangements within the parish were under scrutiny by the borough council. Both the Parish Council and residents had the opportunity to contribute to the review.

It had been agreed the parish of Guilden Sutton should not be abolished and that subject to minor modifications its area should not be altered; the name of the parish should not be altered; the parish should continue to have a parish council; no changes should be made to the electoral arrangements that apply to the parish council and the area of the parish for Guilden Sutton should be re-visited under the terms of reference for the future community governance review of Great Boughton parish.

The minor modifications referred to above included the transfer of properties off Guilden Sutton Lane at Park Farm to Guilden Sutton from Hoole Village and the realignment of the Guilden Sutton/Hoole Village boundary along the line of the Guilden Sutton Lane diversion.

In relation to the review of Great Boughton parish, the Parish Council had suggested consideration may be given to moving the parish boundary from Hare Lane, which was shared by both parishes, to the A41 which would be more logical. Great Boughton PC was in general agreement subject to the views of residents and this emerged as the confirmed outcome together with the A51 becoming the new boundary between the A41 and Hare Lane.

During the year, the Council considered a wide range of consultations by bodies including Cheshire West and Chester Council, the Cheshire Police Authority, Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service and the National Association of Local Councils and responded where appropriate.

Turning to financial matters and the budget for 2015/16, Members remain very conscious of the financial climate affecting constituents. The RFO prepared updated statements of income and expenditure to 31 December 2014, an updated summary of budget variances and the expected position with each at 31 March 2015 together with a forecast out turn based on anticipated expenditure and proposals included within the 2014/15 budget.

The Chairman reported updated papers prepared by the Clerk had been considered by an Audit Group comprising himself and the Vice Chairman, Cllr Paterson. These retained the principle of a 0% increase in Council Tax as in recent years while adjusting the overall budget to include expected variations which would be required in 2015/16 and to reflect Members' wishes to carry out public realm improvements in the area of Pipers Ash to be transferred to Guilden Sutton from Great Boughton.

Particular attention was paid to the proposed financing of the intended budget and to the expected unallocated balances remaining which would reduce risk. A proposed new grounds maintenance contract was carefully scrutinised with existing client councils providing favourable references.

The Audit Group recommended the adoption of the budget and precept as set out in the papers which had been circulated to all Members of the Council for comment. The key features were a budget of £24115 to be financed by precept income of £16614 (reflecting the additional properties transferred from Great Boughton but held at the existing £25.60 per Band D property level applicable within Guilden Sutton parish as requested by Members), council tax reduction grant of £556 and income from other sources including

VAT refund, grants, New Homes Bonus and the use of £2220 from unallocated balances which were estimated at £24603 at 31 March 2015.

This proposal was moved by Cllr Davis, seconded by Cllr Moulton and agreed unanimously.

It was noted the precept would remain at the equivalent of 49p per week for an average band D property within the present Guilden Sutton parish. This should be compared with the total weekly council tax bill for an average property, excluding the Parish Council, in the region of £28.

The Council believes the parish precept represents good value for money but remains fully committed to spending council taxpayers' money wisely and to securing grants towards expenditure wherever this is possible. The Council has ensured, with the ready assistance of Cheshire West and Chester Council, that it takes advantage of reliefs presently available against the non domestic rate applicable to the parish car park resulting in an annual saving in the region of £830. The Council also received a further new homes bonus payment during the year amounting to £1,375.

It is pleasing to note that during the last two years, taking account of grants obtained by the Council and the payment of New Homes Bonus, more than £25,000 has been attracted to the Council's balances in addition to the precept.

Following the borough council acting to alleviate the long standing double taxation anomaly whereby, for example, council taxpayers in Guilden Sutton directly fund the cost of the provision of the children's play area and the parish playing field in addition to making a contribution to similar facilities in non parished areas elsewhere in the borough, council tax payers will again receive a small reduction in their council tax.

Historically annual spending has been rising as additional services and facilities have been provided and other costs have increased, including those of the Clerk whose terms and conditions are kept under review although no cost of living increase applied over a previous three year period. For 2014/15 a national agreement applies as usual with a small increase due but only from 1 January 2015. The Council aims to have a balanced budget in order to build up reserves for major expenditure such as the long term replacement of equipment in the children's play area and similar major projects such as the purchase of a children's playing field. It is pleased that despite these pressures, it has until recently been possible to hold the actual budget at the same level for several years by efficiencies and through attracting grants and other support.

Changes in 2015/16 increase the budget but the Council has been able to hold the precept as mentioned above. These relate to charges for any contested Parish Council election imposed by the borough council (£1000), a proportion of the 2019 election fee (£250), possible training and administrative costs as a result of the new Local Council Awards quality scheme (£500), capital schemes on Hare Lane capital (£1500) and a possible review of the Clerk's hours, partly resulting from the boundary review (£1200).

The borough council elections charges, on the basis of the latest known figures, will amount to £1085.25 for a contested election and £197 if uncontested. It should be noted this is not full cost recovery and the charges are to be reviewed following the election. Up to now, only by elections have been charged where these have not taken place with any other election.

The Council received a qualified opinion from the external auditor on its accounts for 2013/14 due to two technical issues. These involved the recording of council tax reduction grant as part of the precept rather than as other income and incorrectly dating one page of the annual return. There were no other matters which she wished to draw to the Council's attention.

A wide range of issues have been dealt with during the year. The Council is very aware of its responsibility to speak out for local interests, for example in responding to consultations and this is reflected in its very detailed monthly agenda. All issues, both large and small, are considered equally.

With local planning, a slightly lower number of planning applications (17) than usual had been verified at the time of writing, excluding those involving basic tree work compared with 23 the previous year. The Council has, as always, taken a great deal of care to ensure that all aspects are carefully considered and fairly discussed, including the views of both applicants and neighbours, before a response is reached. It is also worth noting that the Council is also consulted on planning applications on or near the Parish boundaries where these would affect Guilden Sutton.

Of the total number of applications received objections were raised to seven proposals, two on a holding basis. Of these three involved applications for new properties and a fourth referred to the proposed allocations hierarchy for the new affordable dwellings on School Lane.

At School Lane, it is worth recalling the proposals for affordable housing led to overwhelming opposition by the unprecedented number of residents who expressed views. The Council had been aware the proposal would be within policy as a rural exception site provided need could be demonstrated but in response to the community concern had submitted a lengthy and detailed objection on the basis the community did not accept building should take place in the Green Belt or that housing need had been demonstrated. Traffic concerns were also raised.

Permission was granted by the borough council on a 6-5 vote subject to conditions including priority being given applicants from within the parish or with ties to it and to negotiations with respect to a financial contribution to accommodate additional numbers at the primary school.

The Parish Council subsequently objected to a conditions application in order to strengthen the priority to be given to local tenants. The standard approach was described as:

1st preference to residents of/local connection with the parish (Guilden Sutton)

2nd preference to residents of/local connection with adjoining parishes (Littleton, Barrow, Mickle Trafford, Christleton, Hoole Village and Great Boughton). Given this is an exception site it would be reasonable to restrict the list of eligible adjoining parishes to rural parishes only

3rd preference to residents of/local connection with the ward (Chester Villages)

4th preference to residents of/local connection with CWaC administrative area

5th preference to anyone deemed to be in need of such housing by the Council and Plus Dane

while the Council's objection read:

The Council OBJECTS to condition 4 as it is in breach with the consistent advice provided to the community as to the cascade to be adopted. The Council would not object to the following:

Priority will be given to applications from within Guilden Sutton or those who have ties as defined. Any remaining tenancies will then be allocated to applicants from Chester Villages ward or from physically adjoining rural wards.

The decision was:

Lettings and sales will be undertaken via a local connection cascade with priority given to residents with a connection to the village of Guilden Sutton. Adactus have pledged to work closely with the parish council to fill/ market the units.

The cascade will then extend to residents with a connection to the adjacent Chester Villages.

Finally the homes will be offered to persons with a connection to CWAC who are in housing need.

For the avoidance of doubt a local connection shall mean:

currently lives or has lived for a minimum period of five years permanent residence in the relevant area of the village or Chester Villages, or

has a strong local connection including a period of residence of five years or more within the last 10 years in the relevant area of the village or Chester Villages, or

has a minimum period of two years permanent residence in the relevant area of the village or Chester Villages, or

has an essential functional need to live close to his or her work in the relevant area of the village or Chester Villages.

Prior to any initial letting of a rental unit or first disposal of a shared ownership unit Adactus will use reasonable endeavours to advertise the same as per the priority list below

The cascade time scales are as follows (in list of priorities)

Parish - 8 weeks

Adjoining parishes - 16 weeks

Chester Villages - 24 weeks

Remainder of the borough – thereafter

All plots will be completed within 60 weeks from a start on site and handed over to Adactus as one complete phase.

It subsequently emerged following an appeal in Mickle Trafford and District that housing need is demonstrated by an assessment by the borough council of need in the ward as a whole and not in a particular parish. In addition, in view of concerns within Guilden Sutton that the application could lead to further development in the field concerned, it should be noted the inspector allowed such an application in similar circumstances in Mickle Trafford. This highlights the need for a robust neighbourhood plan which can identify where development should go.

The Council proposed the development should be known as Willis Close and this was agreed. A request for a 20mph speed limit on that part of School Lane during construction and possibly the construction of nine dwellings at Wood Farm for which there is no known date was not accepted. The Council's full objection to the development is appended to this report.

Separately the Council has agreed that when consultations reveal a strength of community feeling has arisen on any application that will be reflected in the response to the planning authority.

The Council continues to support the group which is now implementing the parish plan for the village. The Council is also supporting a possible neighbourhood plan for the parish and is pleased that progress is being made. An allocation of £2,000 has been made towards the cost. Since the report last year, a well attended public meeting was held with speakers from Tattenhall and District Parish Council, which has completed the first plan in the borough.

It was reported at this meeting 12 months ago that the local planning authority was moving to paperless consultation which raised the question of how effectively adjoining occupiers could be consulted in the absence of large scale plans. This is seen as important by the Council as planning, along with highways, has historically been one of the higher profile aspects of its activities. The change is intended to take advantage of the local planning authority's planning website which enables, for example, all applications in Guilden Sutton and their attached documentation, including decisions, to be tracked. It is worth noting that many external bodies and other borough council services consulted on planning applications already operate on a paperless basis. The system has yet to be implemented in Guilden Sutton although a trial has been in progress with a local council elsewhere in the borough. Other existing services including the ability to speak to a duty planning officer and to visit the planning service in Chester to inspect planning files will continue.

So far as spatial planning is concerned, the Publication Local Plan for Cheshire West and Chester was subject to public hearings and has been adopted subject to main modifications required by the Inspector which did not change the main proposals. No Green Belt land is identified for release for market housing other than a site at Wrexham Road.

The Council believes that continued vigilance to protect the Green Belt is essential and at an earlier stage made a robust response to a review of the land between the A41 and A55 to assess the extent to which it meets the purposes for including areas within the Green Belt. Members argued the five purposes for including land in the Green Belt had been successfully met over a number of years and no change should be made. However, there should be no doubt about the long term pressure for development in the parish with developers having bid for more than 3,500 new homes in and immediately surrounding the village. All are discounted under present Green Belt policies. The Council understands that for the future, market housing growth in Chester Villages ward is likely to be comparatively low compared with some other parts of the borough.

Members previously agreed the Council's response to the consultation on the Local Plan should be confined to supporting the housing target proposed by the borough council of 1,100 dwellings a year during the 20 year plan period and the proposal to release Green Belt land at Wrexham Road for 1,300 dwellings as this would enable all other Green Belt land in the borough to remain as at present. The Council requested to be heard in order to stress the Green Belt to the East of Chester is extremely fragile but this request was declined by the Inspector on the basis the Council was supporting the borough council's proposals. As representations in connection with the plan were being heard from interests outside the borough, the anomaly that a local government organisation within the borough was unable to speak was raised with the Leader of the Council.

The Council's response to the main modifications proposed by the Inspector was informed by the view of the CPRE and was as follows:

Guilden Sutton Parish Council wishes to comment as follows on the following proposed main modifications.

MM1 STRAT1 sustainable development

The Council supports the borough council's proposal to encourage and prioritise the use of previously developed land and does not agree with the inspector's suggestion that 'prioritise' should be deleted from the policy.

The Council believes this weakens the policy from a positive requirement for the use and redevelopment of previously developed land and buildings before the use of greenfield land. The Local Plan should make provision to encourage and give priority to the use and redevelopment of previously developed land and buildings.

MM3 STRAT 3 Chester

The Council supports the borough council's statement that Chester is the key economic driver for the borough and should deliver in the region of 5,200 new dwellings but does not agree with the inspector's suggestion that 'in the region of' should be deleted and replaced with 'at least'.

Members believe that 'at least' would set a minimum requirement which may prove undeliverable over the period of the plan and would leave no control over an upper limit which would then be left to market forces. The borough council's original statement should stand as the Council believes a maximum should be set.

The Council strongly supports the inspector's proposed modification to the final paragraph of STRAT 3.

This would make it clear, in respect of conservation and enhancement that the policy also applies to development on the edge of the built up area in terms of the character and setting of the city. Members argue the recognition of the national and international importance of Chester as a historic city and the need to conserve its character and setting has remained a strategic policy in a succession of regional, structure and local plans. The Chester Green Belt has an additional function of safeguarding the city both its setting as a whole and its special character. The inspector is invited to conclude that in recognition of the national and international importance of Chester as an historic walled city, any development within or on the periphery of the urban area should be compatible with the conservation or enhancement of the special character and setting of the city.

MM7 STRAT8 Rural Area

The Council supports the borough council's proposal that within the rural area provision should be made for in the region of 4,200 new dwellings and disagrees with the inspector that 'in the region of' should be replaced with 'at least' as this would set a minimum requirement which may prove undeliverable over the plan. As no maximum would be set, this would leave no control over an upper limit which is then left to market forces. The Council believes a maximum should be set.

The next stage involves Part Two of the Local Plan which will cover Land Allocation and Detailed Policies. As part of the early consultation on this, the Council was invited to provide details of existing local facilities, which were duly submitted and to indicate possible sites for future development. Given this latter aspect has yet to be concluded by the neighbourhood plan steering group and the community believes the parish has already accommodated sufficient development, no sites were identified.

A large number of local highway matters have remained under consideration.

The Council remains disappointed that a number of motorists exiting Guilden Sutton Lane at the junction with the A 41 ignore the intention that the gap in the central reservation is suitable to allow only one vehicle at a time to turn right into the main road, causing problems for themselves, approaching traffic and the vehicle already waiting. The Council hopes that all motorists using the junction will see the sense of exercising a little patience given the previous difficulties caused by inappropriate manoeuvres have not been entirely eradicated. At the request of the Council, possible measures have been under consideration by the highway authority albeit for some considerable time. At an earlier stage, the highway authority indicated that any right turn ban and/or closure of the gap in the central reservation would cause inconvenience to other road users and would likely lead to a significant increase in U-turn manoeuvres at the Green Lane junction which would not be in the interests of road safety. The possibility of introducing traffic signals could not be justified. It is hoped an agreed 50mph limit on the dual carriageway, strongly supported by the Council, will prove helpful.

During the previous year improvements were made by the highway authority for cyclists wishing to cross the junction which was identified as a black spot in a survey by The Times newspaper. The Council strongly supported concerns raised by Pipers Ash resident Mrs S Proctor that the existing pedestrian route from Hare Lane to Hoole Lane had been removed and this has now been reinstated.

The speed of traffic particularly on Guilden Sutton Lane, School Lane, Wicker Lane, Station Lane and Oaklands remains a concern and the possibility has previously arisen of a speed campaign in the village. This will be revisited at an appropriate stage. The possibility of a bid for a 20mph zone within the existing 30mph limit in the parish has receded somewhat as such measures appear to be losing favour although the principle is proposed by one political group in the forthcoming borough council elections. The views of the community will be important as will the arrangements for financing the measures which will be necessary.

Councillors have previously taken advantage of training with new radar equipment and sites for its use have been assessed although no sessions have been possible. Under such a scheme, details are taken of motorists exceeding the limit and police action follows if the same drivers are detected by the police on a future occasion.

In the meantime, further sessions have been held with the Speed Indicator Device and the Council remains disappointed at the proportion of vehicles which are driven at speeds exceeding the limit. Further sessions are proposed. Speed management is seen by the Council and the community as important and the historic application for a 30mph limit on Guilden Sutton Lane remains on its agenda.

The Council is pursuing the possibility of 'flashing 30' signs on Station Lane due to its increased use as an access to the Greenway and within the village itself due to traffic speeds. It has welcomed a recent indication by the highway authority that such a sign will be provided on School Lane/Guilden Sutton Lane. This would release funding already obtained by the Council and hopefully enable a second device elsewhere in the village.

Parking problems in connection with school traffic on Arrowcroft Road and Hill Top Road continue to be closely monitored.

These are examples of a large number of highway issues within the parish, including access for mobility scooters, which are kept under review by the Council's Traffic Group. In connection with provision for mobility scooters, the Council has welcomed a recent indication that it may be possible to secure a widening of part of the narrow footway on Porters Hill thanks to the generosity of the adjoining occupier in dedicating land.

Street lighting faults continue to be reported although in the last 12 months these have been fewer than usual. Faults can be reported by any resident at any time by telephoning the number and road name of the light concerned to the highway authority on 0300 123 7036 or through the Cheshire West and Chester Council web site. Additional lights are to be provided at Heath Bank and off Church Lane at the path from the Bird in Hand to Cinder Lane for which grants have been obtained from the ward members' budgets.

Members maintain a close interest in bus services serving Guilden Sutton and timetables are closely monitored by the Local Bus User Contact Cllr Roberts. Issues raised during the year included the unreliability of the DB8 service on race days and the need for drivers on the C27 to be aware that Oaklands operates as a hail and ride.

It was reported last year the Council had responded to the consultation on the new Local Transport Plan for Chester by challenging the assertion that Gorse Stacks is a convenient location for the proposed new bus exchange and Members were disappointed their detailed objection did not produce any response and was not accepted. The site has now been approved and the bus exchange is due to open in 2016. The Council's views were based on direct experience of using services from the present stands on Gorse Stacks. The Council pointed out that from parts of the city centre the walk to Gorse Stacks, particularly in bad weather, is long and extremely unpleasant even for the most able. In addition, the footway to and from Northgate Street is inadequate and involves an incline while those in Frodsham Street are narrow and congested as are those on Northgate Street itself at times. These issues alone cast serious doubt as to the suitability of Gorse Stacks for the main bus exchange.

Although it was accepted that some services already involved Gorse Stacks, the Council believed there should be a fundamental reassessment to determine if this location was the best alternative to the present bus exchange and whether a modernisation and enhancement of the bus exchange at its present far more central location may not be a more practical and suitable solution. Members felt the latter option would benefit passengers of all ages, thereby promoting the use of public transport and not only those with limited mobility whether from infirmity or accompanying children for example. Should the Gorse Stacks option be confirmed the Council indicated it would wish to see a considerable enhancement of the footways in Frodsham Street, which were seen as a priority, Northgate Street and to and from Northgate Street and a firm commitment to providing an adequate number of new stops within the Northgate Development while maintaining those elsewhere in the city centre to cater for those who would otherwise find it difficult to use Gorse Stacks. Operators should also be required to maintain services to all stops.

This position was maintained during a further consultation on the detail of the project when the Council insisted the building must be safe and secure and well lit for passengers and commented:

We (Guilden Sutton Parish Council) strongly opposed the location in the first stage of consultation and have not been persuaded to move from that view. Members, who include bus users, believe easily accessible services must be maintained directly into the city centre particularly for groups such as parents with children and buggies and the elderly who may have mobility problems.

The Council is pleased the children's playing field, which is rented from a private landowner, continues to be a well used village amenity. Although the grounds maintenance contractor was reappointed for 2014/15, he declined to tender for 2015/16 and has been replaced by Northwich Town Council (NTC). NTC will also take over responsibility for formal monthly safety inspections of both the field and the play area from the existing inspector in order to bring the work together under one contract. The Council is extremely grateful to its present inspector, Play Inspection and Maintenance Services, which very kindly agreed to step back from 31 March 2015.

Guilden Sutton continues to be deficient in all aspects of open space provision (based on a former Chester City Council survey) and any improvement in the position hinges crucially on land becoming available. The Council would be pleased to hear from landowners who might be able to help. Cheshire West and Chester Council with the Cheshire County Playing Fields Association of which the Council is a member would then be able to assist with help and advice as to funding.

We reported in 2014 it was now some years since the children's play area had benefited from a significant uplift although the condition of the equipment and the safer surfacing receives constant attention. Options had been agreed for a refurbishment including some replacement and new equipment together with new safer surfacing and fundraising was in progress. The Council is pleased to report that the third of three successful bids for funding was completed and the scheme was installed within budget in September.

In addition to the monthly inspection of the play area and playing field by a qualified inspector, a basic visual inspection is carried out on a weekly basis by the Clerk who has gained the appropriate qualification. A statutory annual inspection is carried out by an independent inspector who provides a detailed report. Litter in and around the play area continues to be a problem and as a litter bin is available very close by the Council hopes this will encourage children and their parents to dispose of their litter in this manner.

The appearance of the village is seen to be important and the Council is delighted that scheduled activities by the borough council are supplemented by the continuing splendid efforts, on a voluntary basis, of Mrs Lyn Littler. In addition the Clerk attends to the playing field, the children's play area, the parish car park and the high footfall area in the vicinity of the school/shops/village hall as a supplementary duty.

Standards in the centre of the village and on other pathways throughout the parish were agreed with the borough council at an earlier stage as a result of the Parish Council pressing for improvements in the maintenance of the dingle path and steps at the rear of Oaklands, the pedestrianised length of Cinder Lane from Church Lane to Cinder Lane and the field side footway and hedges in Cinder Lane, all of which are part of the Longster Trail along with the school access at the rear of Orchard Croft. These were placed in a maintenance regime and are monitored by the Council which does not hesitate to make strong and persistent representations to secure improvements if standards decline. To this end a meeting was held with the Service Co-ordinator on 19 November 2014.

Public footpaths are seen by the Council as an important part of village life and Members would wish to thank the former Parish Rights of Way Warden, Mr Brian Lewin for his work particularly in bringing issues to the notice of the borough council's rights of way unit. New volunteers to join the parish paths group are always welcome as the extension of the Millennium Greenway to Mickle Trafford, with a link to Guilden Sutton Lane, is included in the group's remit. The need for additional signage at the junction of Garners Lane and Guilden Sutton Lane to warn both users of the Greenway and traffic on Guilden Sutton Lane remains under consideration. During the year, the Footpath Group accounts were returned to the Council and will continue to be held as an earmarked reserve.

It may be recalled the Parish Council opposed the proposal by Cheshire County Council to upgrade the status of public footpath No. 7, the green lane on the boundary of Guilden Sutton and Mickle Trafford parishes, to a byway open to all traffic on the basis of historical evidence dating back to earlier centuries. The Parish Council continues to monitor the character and condition of the route which, with Garners Lane, is designated as a restricted byway with access rights for pedestrians, cyclists and horses. The deterioration in the condition of route during the year has been raised.

An unexpected improvement was achieved to the dingle path at the rear of Oaklands and the path from the Bird in Hand to Cinder Lane as a result of high voltage cable laying by Scottish Power. This has been welcomed.

The Council believes that trees play a vital part in the village environment and would wish to thank Cllr Brown, the parish tree warden, for her efforts. Issues around trees and hedges appear in the Council's monthly agenda including the increasing obstruction of the footway on Guilden Sutton Lane and at other locations in the village by overgrown hedges.

The parish car park on Church Lane saw a significant uplift during the year including new bay markings and signage and heavy maintenance to the landscaping.

The Council's newsletter continues to appear and has now reached its 162nd issue. Members would be pleased to hear comments as to its value in helping the Council's communications within the Parish.

The three parish notice boards at Guilden Sutton Lane, opposite the Summerfield Road shops and at the car park on Church Lane continue to be well used.

Due to its proximity to the urban area, the parish suffers from a great deal of indiscriminate dumping of refuse, particularly in Belle Vue Lane and Guilden Sutton Lane. This continues to be a serious concern. The same applies to tipping in the dingle at the rear of Oaklands. Such action is deprecated by the Council which believes that residents should appreciate the good environment the village is fortunate to enjoy. It is emphasised that generally action will only be taken by the borough council to remove dumping from flat verges adjoining the highway.

The Council would be pleased to receive views on the Parish's entry in the Cheshire Community Pride competition, formerly the Cheshire Best Kept Village Competition, having again decided there was insufficient support to participate in 2015. Marks in earlier years, although no worse than average, had highlighted that a number of aspects needed to be improved including the extent of community involvement.

The Council remains concerned at the degree of dog fouling within the village, particularly on the footpath leading to the primary school and the dingle footpath. This is a totally unnecessary problem and the Council hopes that the small minority of dog owners concerned would feel more able to play their part in tackling the problem. The borough council points out that litter bins can also be used for the reception of canine faeces. It is important to note that a new borough wide dog control order to help deal with dog fouling is now in force. A new initiative has been launched enabling irresponsible fouling to be highlighted by pink spray paint and a supply has been requested.

On health issues, the Council expressed concern when a serious fall in the village saw a two and a half hour delay in an ambulance attending. The matter was advised to Healthwatch. During the year funding was obtained from the ward members' budgets for the provision of a public access defibrillator, possibly to be located at the Village Hall.

The Council is pleased that PC Rob Boulton has established police surgeries at the Summerfield Road shops. Generally Guilden Sutton is seen as a relatively peaceful village although there have in the past been isolated instances of anti social behaviour in the vicinity of the play area and the Village Hall. PC Boulton repeatedly emphasises the need for occupiers to keep all property secure including garages, sheds and vehicles. Contact details for PC Boulton, together with monthly reports, appear in the Post Office window. The Council was pleased the Police and Crime Commissioner accepted an invitation to attend the fete.

The Council continues to embrace information technology. A significant and increasing proportion of the Clerk's contact with Members and with the principal authorities and other organisations and individuals has been carried out through e-mail for a number of years. More recently the Council has introduced a Twitter account. Under the leadership of previously Cllr Fisher, and more recently Mr Brian Lewin, the excellent village web site has been further developed and offers an ever increasing range of information about the Council and the community, attracting praise from this country and overseas. Further engagement by local organisations and individual residents is welcome, particularly feedback. It should be noted the content of the site is in the hands of the webmaster and contributors although the main purpose should be to provide information. The protocol provides for topics on which there may be strongly held views and also advertising material to be signposted in order to distinguish these pages from the main content. During the year, the completion of the roll out of fibre optic broadband to the village was marked on 21 November 2014.

There has, as yet, been no direct impact on the parish of proposals for fracking. The Clerk attended an informative debate on the issue at the University of Chester while a geophysical survey between Ellesmere Port and Chester reached only as far as the outskirts of the parish.

Civic duties have included the laying of the customary wreath on Remembrance Sunday in memory of the fallen. The Council is pleased it was able to secure a new plate listing those who gave their lives in the Great War for the 2014 service.

At an earlier stage, the Council spent a considerable amount of time considering provision for youth. Illustrative proposals were on display for comment at a community drop in. The Council was pleased to hear from young people themselves and also took account of representations made by residents that any proposals should be preceded by consultation. The issue of provision for youth is set against the backdrop that the Parish Council controls no suitable land itself. It is accepted the use of borough council owned amenity areas at the dell and Fox Cover should be discounted as unsuitable. No further progress is possible at the present time given the lack of suitable sites. The provision of facilities is an aspiration within the parish plan.

Despite its busy agenda the Council strives to keep in touch with village life and what is important to people in Guilden Sutton. In addition to public speaking time and the regular surgeries previously mentioned which allow for community engagement, during the year the Council made a further grant to the village fete, again secured a borough council grant towards the cost of graveyard maintenance incurred by St John's PCC and agreed to continue to provide financial assistance to the Village Hall Christmas Tree following the planting of a permanent tree. It also agreed a £1,000 contribution to the cost of the new heating in the Village Hall by way of a pump primer grant to encourage further fundraising.

Councillors have welcomed the introduction of the Community Cinema initiative and also the Rambling Club. Community issues currently on the agenda include resilience planning to help the village in the event of an emergency and the activities of the Bird in Hand support group following the successful application for the Bird in Hand to be designated as a community asset.

Discussions at the request of the Rector and Churchwardens as to whether the War Memorial should move from its present location due to traffic issues around the Remembrance Day Service have not progressed. This is due to a request for advice from the highway authority and event planners at both the borough council and the constabulary resulting in an enhanced Police presence. In addition the borough council now issues a formal road closure notice in connection with the service. During the year the Council was also involved in discussions with the PCC on a proposal for a replacement church hall.

In conclusion, the Council would wish to thank Cheshire West and Chester Council, the Cheshire Association of Local Councils, our local borough councillors Margaret and Stuart Parker and Mr Stephen Mosley MP for their unfailing help and support during the year.

Inevitably an annual report passes over the great deal of routine, day to day activities by the Council which taken together contribute greatly to the well being of the community. I would therefore pay tribute to the Council and our Clerk for their continuing hard work and determination during the last 12 months and believe the parish is fortunate that Members have felt able to come forward with their time to serve the community. The Council is pleased to be able to report that at the inaugural Excellence Awards for Local Councils organised by Cheshire West and Chester Council and the Cheshire Association of Local Councils our Clerk was the winner in the category for Outstanding service by a Clerk.

This will be even more valuable in the future as the pace and extent of change affecting public services continues to increase. I have already mentioned issues such as the reviews of governance and the Green Belt within the parish which have taken place along with affordable housing. How public services are delivered in the future and by whom along with Localism will be a challenge for us all.

Cllr Mike Roberts

Chairman.

Ref. No: 13/05410/FUL Residential development of 18 dwellings including 14 affordable units and associated vehicular access to School Lane.

Land Adjacent To Treetops School Lane Guilden Sutton Chester Cheshire

The Parish Council wishes to object to this application. Those responding to the consultation overwhelmingly oppose development on this Green Belt site and question whether need has been established. These views mirror exactly those of residents who have attended a series of consultation events organised by the Council. In addition, a majority of those responding to the independent housing need survey opposed development. At the time of writing, no support has been indicated to the Council. On this basis Members believe they must follow their long established policy, reflected in the adopted Guilden Sutton Parish Plan and in the comments of the Spatial Planning Team, of opposing what is clearly seen to be inappropriate development in the Green Belt.

The further principal concern is traffic issues. That part of School Lane is close to the primary school which has a higher than average proportion of out of zone pupils. Conditions at peak hours are difficult and the Council believes that if approved, the development should be set back to better reflect the traditional building line in the village and to allow vehicles to enter and exit in a forward gear thus avoiding reversing manoeuvres onto School Lane. The cumulative effect on School Lane/Guilden Sutton Lane and the junction of Guilden Sutton Lane and the A41, including the net increase of eight dwellings on the nearby Wood Farm site, should also be taken into account.

It is further believed protected species of Great Crested Newts and bats may be present on the application site. These should be assessed.

The Council also wishes to draw attention to inaccurate or incomplete information within the application which may cause concern as to other content. This includes references to access to Hoole lane and Chester, the number of churches within walking distance and the frequency of bus services.

Should the LPA be minded to approve the application, the Council requests the following conditions

(i) Affordable housing. Social rented and part ownership affordable housing within the development should remain social rented and part ownership in perpetuity.

Prior to the commencement of development an affordable housing scheme should be submitted to the local planning authority for approval in writing. The scheme should include details of:

The numbers, type, tenure and location on the site of the affordable housing provision to be made.

The management of the affordable housing.

The occupancy criteria to determine the identity of prospective and successive occupiers including the identification of means to ensure such occupancy conditions are enforced.

The timing of the construction of the affordable housing and of any phasing in relation to the occupancy of the market housing. All affordable dwellings should be constructed prior to or at the same time as the market dwellings.

Arrangements to ensure that such provision is affordable for both the first and subsequent occupiers of the affordable housing.

Priority in allocating tenures should be given to those from within Guilden Sutton parish or with demonstrable close ties to it.

(ii) Materials. No development should commence until samples of the materials to be used for the construction of the external surfaces of the dwellings have been submitted for approval in writing by the local planning authority. These should reflect the vernacular of nearby properties. Development should be carried out in complete accordance with the approved materials.

(iii) Construction traffic. Prior to the commencement of development full details of arrangements for construction traffic for the development, including temporary highway vehicle and pedestrian routings, times and days of large vehicle movements to and from the site and suitable off-highway parking for all construction related vehicles and when required vehicle cleansing facilities, should be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The development should then be carried out in strict accordance with the agreed details. No such traffic should be permitted to enter any part of the Oaklands estate, including Hill Top Road, or Arrowcroft Road or to wait at any time on adjoining lengths of School Lane, Oaklands and Arrowcroft Road.

(iv) Highway and footway access. No dwelling should be occupied until highway and footway access to it from School Lane has been constructed up to binder course level. The surface course should then be completed within a timescale to be agreed in writing by the local planning authority.

(v) Parking. No development should commence until full details of the parking facilities for cycles and cars have been submitted to and agreed in writing by the local planning authority. No approved dwelling should be occupied until car and cycle parking for the dwelling has been provided in accordance with the agreed details and the approved parking facilities provided should be retained at all times thereafter. Permitted development rights should be removed for the conversion of any garaging to residential.

(vi) Construction method statement. No development should commence until a construction method statement has been submitted to, and approved in writing by, the local planning authority. The approved statement should be adhered to throughout the construction period. The statement should provide for:

The parking of vehicles of site operatives and visitors in particular avoiding any on road parking at any time on adjoining lengths of School Lane, Oaklands and Arrowcroft Road.

Loading and unloading of plant and materials in particular avoiding any on road waiting at any time on adjoining lengths of School Lane, Oaklands and Arrowcroft Road.

Storage of plant and materials used in constructing the development.

Wheel washing facilities.

Measures to control the emission of dust, dirt, noise, vibration and light during construction.

A scheme for recycling/disposing of waste resulting from construction works.

The hours of construction.

No construction which should take place outside 8am to 6pm Monday to Friday and 8am to 1pm on Saturday or at any time on Sunday or Bank Holidays. In particular there should be no deliveries or movement of heavy plant and equipment during the hours of 8.15am and 9.15am, 3pm and 4pm and 5pm and 6pm to avoid peak hours including school traffic.

(vii) Landscaping. No development should take place until full details of both hard and soft landscaping works have been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority and these works should then be carried out as approved. The details should include hard surfacing materials and a planting plan particularly to include the boundary with School Lane.

If within a period of five years from the date of initial planting any trees or shrubs planted in accordance with approved landscaping works are removed, die, become diseased or seriously damaged then replacement trees or shrubs should be planted in the next planting season of similar size and species.

(viii) Lighting. Prior to the commencement of development details of any temporary or permanent external lighting to be provided as part of the development should be submitted and approved in writing by the local planning authority. Development should then be carried out in accordance with the approved details.

(ix) Play area provision. Payment to Guilden Sutton Parish Council of any sums due for the improvement of play area provision maintained by the Parish Council should be due on occupation of the first dwelling within the development.